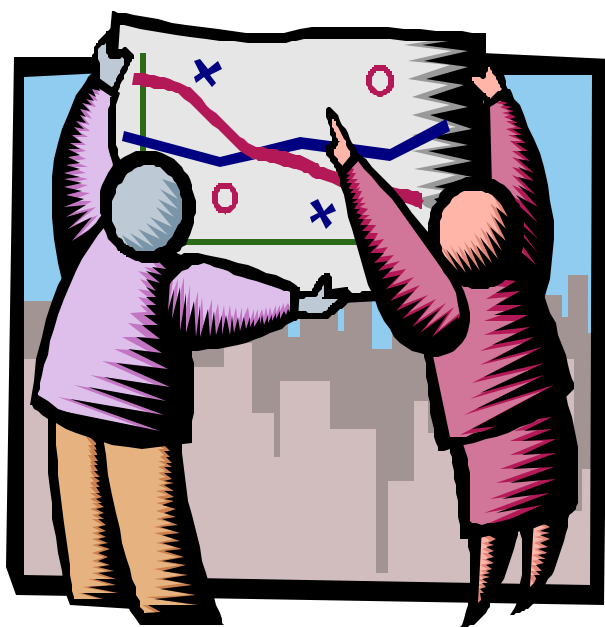


# PLANNING: USING ASSESSMENT DATA

7-E



Job Performance  
Situation 7:  
Improving Program  
Quality Through  
Program Monitoring  
and Self-Assessment

HEAD START  
*MOVING AHEAD*  
COMPETENCY-BASED TRAINING PROGRAM



Developed under delivery order number 105-97-2043, the Head Start Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Revised in 2000 by the American Institutes for Research under contract number 105-94-2020

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This material was produced in 1998, by Education Development Center, Inc., and Circle Solutions, Inc.

## REFERENCE

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This activity develops skill competencies in *planning*. At Head Start organizations, planning helps ensure that program resources are used to fully promote the mission and vision of the organization. It gives structure to agency operations and provides a road map for staff performance. Planning provides the basis for program evaluation activities. Indeed, planning occurs at all levels of the organization.

Participants will learn how to use program assessment data to determine planning options. They will know how to select options that promote the organization's mission and vision, and how to develop and revise goals and objectives. They will learn how to set priorities to meet short- and long-term objectives, and they will be able to allocate tasks according to staff skills and experience. Finally, they will understand and learn how to manage workflow.

Related skill activities include 3–D, Decision-Making: Building Consensus; 5–C, Conflict Resolution: Understanding the Elements; 7–C, Program Monitoring and Self-Assessment: Leading a Program Monitoring or Self-Assessment; and 7–D, Program Monitoring and Self-Assessment: Collecting Data Using Multiple Sources.

*Sources.* Training Guides for the Head Start Learning Community, *Participating in the Management Process*, 1997, and *Planning for Transition*, 1997. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Argenti, P. A. *The Portable MBA Desk Reference*. 1994. New York: John Wiley & Sons. Koteen, J. *Strategic Management in Public and Nonprofit Organizations*. 1989. New York: Praeger. *Head Start Social Services Training Manual*. 1990. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

*Other Resources.* This activity is of necessity limited in its scope and does not cover all aspects of planning. Learners can use many excellent Head Start and commercial resources for further future study. For example, *Plan or Die*, by Timothy Nolan, Leonard Good Stern, and J. W. Pfeiffer, is an excellent primer on the strategic planning process. The Head Start Training Guide *Planning and Reviewing for Success*, is also an excellent resource.

# OVERVIEW

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## Using Assessment Data

**Outcomes.** Participants who complete this activity will be able to

- identify the three basic elements that make up all types of plans
- use a common planning acronym, SWOT, to analyze assessment data
- distinguish between strategic and operational planning
- develop goals and SMART objectives

**Materials.** Newsprint and markers

## Components

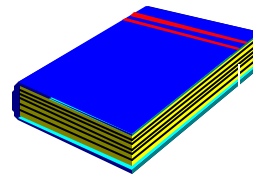
This activity can be done by one person, an informal group, or a formal workshop. We have provided suggested times, but participants and facilitators may wish to adjust these to their own timetables.

Step 1. Background Reading: Introduction to Planning	15 min.
Step 2. Worksheet: Which Type of Planning?	10 min.
Step 3. Background Reading: Grounding Your Plan in Reality	15 min.
Handout: Two Data Analysis Conversations	5 min.
Step 4. Worksheet: Identifying Organizational Options	40 min.
Step 5. Background Reading: Goal Setting and SMART Objectives	15 min.
Handout: Planning Charts	5 min.
Step 6. Worksheet: Recognizing SMART Objectives	45 min.
Step 7. Summary	15 min.
Suggested total time	2 hrs. 30 min.

This activity contains 29 pages.

# STEP 1. BACKGROUND READING: INTRODUCTION TO PLANNING

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Suggested time: 15 min.

Feel free to highlight sections or write comments in the margins for any of these activities.

Planning is an essential ingredient in high-quality program operations. It is a process that “involves a continuous cycle of developing, implementing, reviewing and refining a plan to achieve...goals.”<sup>1</sup> The product of this ongoing process is a road map that communicates to those involved the direction in which they are going, why they are going to go there, what they want to accomplish, and how they are going to do it.

The successful Head Start program uses the planning process in numerous ways to ensure the delivery of quality services. The director, the Policy Council, and other key decision-makers develop plans concerning the program’s overall direction. Managers develop plans to guide day-to-day operations. Classroom teams plan curriculum for the children assigned to them. Staff plan services to meet the needs of families. In Head Start, everyone plans.

Federal staff play the following key roles in the planning processes of local grantees:

- providing important data to inform planning decisions through the federal monitoring process
- reviewing and evaluating program goals as part of the grant application process
- providing technical assistance on planning to grantee directors

These skill-building activities cannot cover operational and strategic planning in its entirety. But the Background Readings in Steps 1, 3, and 5 provide information on several critical pieces:

- understanding the need for planning
- deciding when strategic and operational planning are needed
- using SWOT analysis to identify planning options
- setting and implementing goals and SMART objectives

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<sup>1</sup> Training Guides for the Head Start Learning Community, *Planning for Transitions*. 1997. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, p. 119.

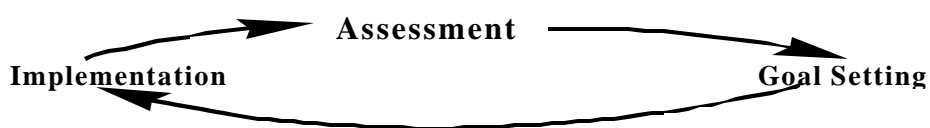
## I. WHY PLAN?

Planning takes time and effort, but the alternative is even more costly. Program managers or staff who do not engage in effective planning processes are doomed to a life of crisis management—a continuous round of dealing with emergency situations as they arise. True, some managers are at their best in a crisis: they enjoy the challenge of quick, decisive action and the autonomy that it gives them. But crisis-type responses can severely tax an organization's resources: equipment and supplies needed to respond to the situation are purchased or diverted from other uses with no cost; highly paid staff perform functions typically performed by staff at lower wage scales; and overworked staff become exhausted and susceptible to illness or other effects of stress.

Programs that fail to plan face another significant risk. As the world around us rapidly changes, so do the needs of children and families in our communities. Programs that fail to monitor and respond to population and economic changes and to shifts in the political climate may find themselves offering services that are no longer needed. Families who once relied on Head Start may then seek more responsive organizations to fill their early care and education needs.

### Elements of Planning

Regardless of the type of planning or the level of the organization at which it occurs, most successful planning processes follow a continuous cycle that comprises three phases: assessment, setting goals and objectives, and implementation.



*Assessment* involves collecting data that leaders use to inform their planning. In *Leading a Program Monitoring or Self-Assessment*, we discuss elements of two Head Start assessments: the federal monitoring and the annual self-assessment. Local programs use other mechanisms to collect data, including the community assessment and the PIR.

*Goal Setting* involves (1) identifying future directions, both short and long range, in the light of these assessments; (2) translating the goals into action steps and assigning responsibility for initiating and completing them; and (3) setting priorities and timelines. It may mean developing new goals and objectives or simply refining those that already exist.

*Implementation* means making the plan come to life by acting on the steps defined in the goal-setting phase. It converts the thoughts and dreams of planners into the day-to-day operations that fulfill the mission of the organization.

### Who Needs to Be Involved?

Although the elements remain essentially the same, the players are different. Yet as a general rule, people who are involved in carrying out the plan need to be involved in its construction. For example:

- for long-term or strategic planning, it is essential that members of the governing body, Policy Council members, and grantee agency staff be engaged along with members of the Head Start management team. Frequently it is helpful to engage members of community agencies as well.
- for program-wide operational planning, involvement of the entire management team is warranted.

Involving the same people in creating and implementing the plan grounds it in reality and helps to build buy-in among the people who are implementing it. If this approach is not workable, it is essential that planners effectively communicate their decisions and the rationales behind them to those who will carry out the plan.

## II. STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL PLANNING

In *strategic* or *long-range planning*, programs typically address issues for which there is no easy answer. Strategic or long-range plans deal with issues that will

- take longer than a program year to address (e.g., changing from a part-day operational model to a full-year, full-day model; converting the program's data management systems from paper to a computer format; or raising the program's minimal educational requirement for teachers from a CDA to a bachelor's degree)

- require input or information from outside sources, (e.g., trends in the community or nation that will impact program operations)
- require resources beyond those that staff can currently access ( e.g., outside funding to provide an onsite GED program)

Strategic planning is an ongoing process. It begins with an assessment of community strengths, needs, and resources as well as emerging trends. Using these findings, Head Start staff can identify overall goals and long-term program and financial objectives that support the program's mission. Strategic planning is an inclusive process that requires shared decision-making among board members, Policy Council groups, agency administrative staff, Head Start program staff, and other community organizations.<sup>2</sup> Generally, strategic planning deals with the allocation of large amounts of the program's resources and its interactions with its external environment.<sup>3</sup>

*Operational or short-term planning* involves developing and implementing the strategies, activities, timelines, and responsibilities needed to carry out the program according to all Head Start requirements. Operational planning is more detailed than strategic planning and focuses on day-to-day program operations. It provides staff members and parents with a map for fulfilling their roles and day-to-day responsibilities.<sup>4</sup>

Head Start services are complex, and some issues require both strategic (long-term) and operational (short-term) planning. For example, in a community that lacks dental resources, agency staff need to identify ways to meet the dental needs of the families currently enrolled in their program (operational planning) and ways to improve dental services on a more permanent basis (strategic planning).

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<sup>2</sup> Training Guides for the Head Start Learning Community, *Participating in the Management Process*. 1997. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, p.12.

<sup>3</sup> Argenti, P. A., *The Portable MBA Desk Reference*. 1994. New York: John Wiley & Sons, p. 368.

<sup>4</sup> *Participating in the Management Process*. 1997, p. 12.



## STEP 2. WORKSHEET: WHICH TYPE OF PLANNING?

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Suggested time: 10 min.

**Purpose:** To give participants a chance to apply what they have learned about strategic and operational planning.

Read each vignette, then put a check mark beside the type of planning you think is needed.

1. A review of your community assessment and the results of a group interview with family service staff indicate that there is a growing community of Southeast Asian families in your service area whose primary language is Hmong.

- ☐ Strategic planning
- ☐ Operational planning

2. Classroom observations by the program's education supervisors as well as discussions at education staff meetings indicate that teachers are struggling with a growing number of children who exhibit challenging behaviors in the classroom.

- ☐ Strategic planning
- ☐ Operational planning

3. You are a family services manager. Your program implemented a service planning system (case conferencing) within the last year that has promoted service planning by interdisciplinary classroom teams.

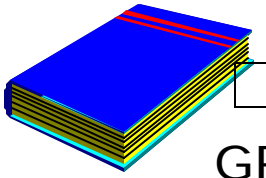
- ☐ Strategic planning
- ☐ Operational planning

4. It is July. Your program has a long-term lease for a two-classroom center in Cityville. For many years there has been a waiting list of eligible families who would like to enroll their children in that center. Last year, the Cityville City Council voted to end rent control in the city. Family service workers now report that they do not have enough applicant families to fill the two classrooms next year. You've planned a meeting with the program's governing body to discuss options.

- ☐ Strategic planning
- ☐ Operational planning

5. This year's PIR indicates that follow-up services were not provided to 30 percent of families who indicated a need for services during the program year.

- ☐ Strategic planning
- ☐ Operational planning



## STEP 3. BACKGROUND READING: GROUNDING YOUR PLAN IN REALITY

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Suggested time: 15 min.

The successful leader makes sure that plans are grounded in an organization's current and *potential* reality. He develops goals to address gaps between what exists now and the future he would choose for the program. These gaps can be needs in the environment that the organization hopes to address (e.g., the gap between the need for all families to have access to ongoing medical care and the number of families in the community that do). They can be needs in program operation (e.g., the gap between the number of home visits the program plans to complete and the number that it has completed). Successful Head Start planners do a careful assessment—an analysis of what should be and what is—to determine new goals and confirm or replace existing ones.

Assessment and planning are two parts of the continuous cycle of program improvement. Assessment that is not used to improve planning is assessment that is underused. Planning that takes place independent of assessment is underinformed. The exhibit on the next page graphically depicts how assessment informs planning.

### I. USING SWOT ANALYSIS TO IDENTIFY PLANNING OPTIONS

One tried and tested way to begin a planning process is a SWOT analysis. Although it comes from the strategic planning literature, it can be used in operational planning as well.

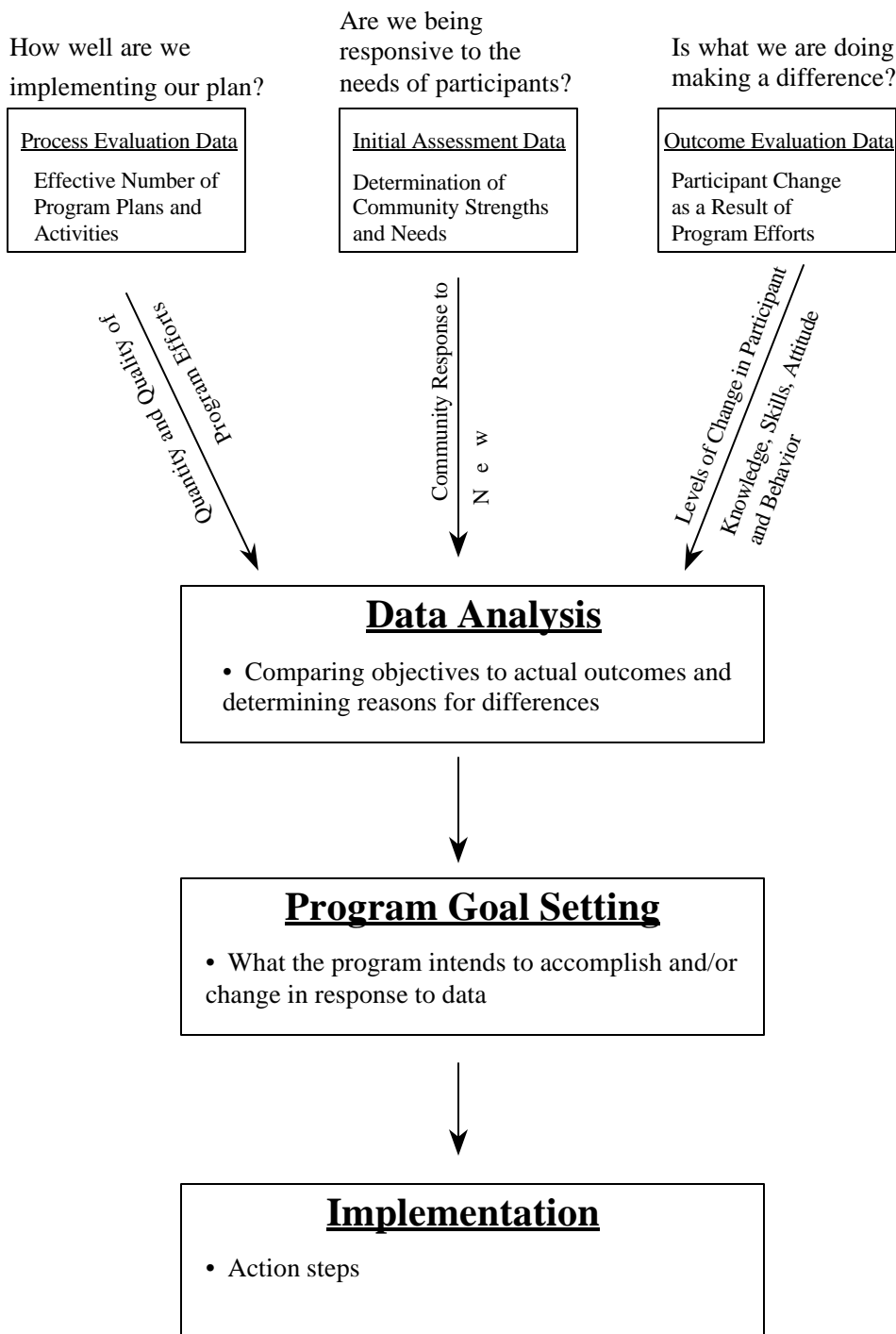
SWOT stands for **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities, and **T**hreats. **S**trengths and **W**eaknesses refer to internal program data. Strengths refer to an organization's "capabilities, contacts, and motivations,"<sup>5</sup> and weaknesses to factors that diminish an organization's ability to provide quality services. **O**pportunities and **T**hreats are external. Opportunities refer to major favorable situations in the organization's environment. Threats refer to reasonably probable events that would produce significant damage to the organization if they were to occur.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Koteen, J., *Strategic Management in Public and Nonprofit Organizations*. 1989. New York: Praeger.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

# How Assessment Informs the Planning System



A SWOT analysis can help program planners interpret a vast array of internal and external data. Although planning experts use a variety of approaches to conduct a SWOT analysis, most include these basic steps:

- review all available assessment data
- through brainstorming or other methods, identify and sort critical factors according to strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats
- determine which factors will have the greatest impact on the future direction of the program
- analyze the implications of critical factors and the options that flow from them

## Review All Available Assessment Data

As a wise planner, you will want to take advantage of the many types of Head Start assessment data to inform your plans. Use the following data to alert you to strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in your immediate environment.

- information from your community assessment document and from frequent monitoring of the community
- internal data from staff performance reviews, service-tracking systems, and your annual program information report (PIR)
- your budget and other financial records
- assessment data from your annual self-assessment or federal monitoring reviews that can tell you how well your organization is meeting the requirements of the Head Start Performance Standards and your own goals and objectives

(Refer to the exhibit “How Assessment Informs the Planning System.”)

## Identify Critical Factors

SWOT factors can include people, resources, knowledge, experience, services, or systems.

For example, La Paloma is a mid-size Head Start program that serves 500 children and families in a town in California 50 miles from a large metropolitan area. To begin their planning process for the renewal of their Head Start grant, the management team conducted a SWOT analysis. A brainstorm of SWOT factors yielded the following results.

***Strength.*** La Paloma’s PIR revealed that all of the organization’s lead teachers exceed Head Start’s minimal qualifications and hold bachelor’s degrees in early childhood education. The federal monitoring team

complimented the program on the quality of its classroom services, especially in the areas of individualization and curriculum.

**Weakness.** A review of health-tracking forms during the annual self-assessment revealed that program staff are unable to keep up with the program's record-keeping requirements.

**Opportunity.** The community assessment revealed that the new personnel director of an HMO in the community is a Head Start graduate who is interested in providing employment opportunities for Head Start parents and wants to work to assure that Head Start families' health needs are being met.

**Threat.** The community assessment revealed that growth in the community may result in the school district reclaiming the classroom space that it currently provides at no charge to Head Start.

## Pose Analytical Questions to Identify Planning Options

Recognizing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that a program faces is only the first step. Next, decision-makers must analyze the implications of each. This analysis can be a complex process, especially if it is part of strategic or long-term planning.

Frequently, program leaders use guiding questions to steer their planning team through the analysis. The questions for each SWOT element have the same basic purpose: learn the implications for the program's future. But they differ slightly from element to element. For each element we have identified potential questions.

<p><b><i>To analyze strengths:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How can we take full advantage of this strength?</li> <li>▪ How can we capitalize on it in the future?</li> <li>▪ What costs are associated with maintaining this strength?</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>To analyze weaknesses:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What is the cause of the weakness?</li> <li>▪ How is it affecting our ability to provide services?</li> <li>▪ What can we do to eliminate or compensate for the weakness?</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>To analyze opportunities:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Is this opportunity related to our organizational purpose and vision?</li> <li>▪ What internal resources are available to help us take advantage of this opportunity?</li> <li>▪ How will taking advantage of this opportunity affect our existing operations?</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>To analyze threats:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ When will the threat begin to affect our organization?</li> <li>▪ Do our current program practices make the threat more likely?</li> <li>▪ What can we do to minimize or avoid the threat?</li> </ul>

As you help your planning team analyze the implications of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, be sure to

- analyze items individually *and* consider the interactions between them. (For example, by looking at the opportunities presented by the child development services manager's availability to explore collaborations, the La Paloma team identified a potential strategy for dealing with the threat of a loss of space.)
- consider whether a strength in one area is contributing to a weakness in another. (For example, is La Paloma's commitment to employing lead teachers with a minimum of a bachelor's degree draining resources from other service areas?)
- focus the discussion on the bottom line: the quality of services to children and families.
- identify multiple options for future strategies.

## II. HOW FEDERAL STAFF CAN SUPPORT A SWOT ANALYSIS

Federal staff members' exposure to a wide range of program practices provides them with a broad perspective that local program managers often lack. Because of this perspective, they can often provide unique advice to program planning teams. Although the federal program specialist is usually not a member of the planning team that conducts a SWOT analysis, he can contribute to the process in a number of ways.

**Use the Federal Review Process and Report to Suggest Ways That the Program Can Capitalize Upon Its Strengths.**

In the past, reviewers often advised the program about its strengths merely to temper their negative feedback about program weaknesses. The new emphasis on discussing strengths can help local leaders take advantage of their strengths by helping them explore them more fully.

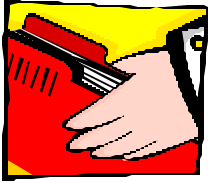
**Provide Information on Ways That Other Grantees Have Successfully Addressed Their Weaknesses.**

Even if grantees know that their services are ineffective, they often need help in developing an appropriate response. Federal leaders can support

them by suggesting examples of successful program practices that they can modify to meet their own needs.

### Suggest Local Resources That Grantees Can Tap In Their Local Environment.

Although the federal reviewer may not have extensive knowledge of the grantee's local community, she often has general knowledge of organizations (e.g., the LEA, United Way) and resources (e.g., available state funding) that are typically found in similar communities.



# HANDOUT: TWO DATA ANALYSIS CONVERSATIONS

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Suggested time: 5 min.

## Conversation 1

**Strength:** The La Paloma PIR reveals that all of its lead teachers hold bachelor's degrees in early childhood education. The federal monitoring team has complimented the program on its outstanding classroom services in the areas of individualization and curriculum.

**Question:** What advantages does this strength provide us?

**Answer:** Because of their solid grounding in the basics of early childhood education, teachers are able to conduct parent workshops on child growth and development and healthy discipline practices; effectively mentor and supervise teaching assistants; and represent the child's educational interests in internal case conferencing and external IEP meetings.

**Question:** Are we taking full advantage of this strength?

**Answer:** Yes. We have effectively transferred some training, supervision, and case management responsibilities from the child development services manager to the lead teachers, thereby freeing the child development services manager to take on higher-level functions, such as collaboration with other local education leaders.

**Question:** How can we capitalize on this strength in the future?

**Answer:** We will identify opportunities for the child development services manager to take on new responsibilities. She is particularly interested in becoming involved in our collaboration efforts.

## Conversation 2

**Weakness:** A review of health-tracking forms at La Paloma reveals that staff are unable to keep up with record-keeping requirements.

**Question:** What is the cause of the weakness? Do staff need additional training in record-keeping?



**Answer:** No. They understand how to record the information properly.

**Question:** Are staff's other responsibilities too extensive to allow them to record information regularly?

**Answer:** No. The family workers share the record-keeping responsibility with the health manager. Each family worker is responsible for working with 34 families, a reasonable number.

**Question:** Does the program's record-keeping system promote efficient recording of data?

**Answer:** No. The program is using an inefficient paper-based system to track the health records of 500 families.

**Question:** Is this weakness affecting our ability to provide services?

**Answer:** Yes, because we do not know how many and which children need follow-up care.

**Question:** How can we eliminate or compensate for this weakness?

**Answer:** We can improve our paper-based system by replacing some forms with better ones. Or we can invest in a computer-based system.



## STEP 4. WORKSHEET: IDENTIFYING ORGANIZATIONAL OPTIONS

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Suggested time: 40 min.

**Purpose:** To provide participants with an opportunity to identify (1) an organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats and (2) the organizational options indicated by the data.

**Part I (10 min.)** Reread the following vignettes. Decide whether the data provide evidence of a strength, a weakness, an opportunity, or a threat. Compare your answers with those of others in your group. Be prepared to support your decision. Feel free to refer back to the preceding reading.

**Part II (30 min.)** As a group, use the questions in the Step 3 text for analyzing SWOT elements, or other SWOT questions that you develop, to identify organizational options that the program might consider.

1. A review of the program's community assessment and the results of a group interview with family service staff indicate that there is a growing community of Southeast Asian families in your service area whose primary language is Hmong.

SWOT

*Questions to consider for vignette 1:*

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*Possible organizational options:*

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2. Classroom observations by the program's education supervisors as well as discussions at education staff meetings indicate that teachers are struggling with a growing number of children who exhibit challenging behaviors in the classroom.

SWOT

*Questions to consider for vignette 2:*

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*Possible organizational options:*

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3. You are a family services manager. Your program implemented a service planning system (case conferencing) within the last year that has promoted service planning by interdisciplinary classroom teams.

SWOT

*Questions to consider for vignette 3:*

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*Possible organizational options:*

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4. It is July. Your program has a long-term lease for a two-classroom center in Cityville. For many years there has been a waiting list of eligible families who would like to enroll their children in that center. Last year, the Cityville City Council voted to end rent control in the city. Family service workers now report that they do not have enough applicant families to fill the two classrooms next year. You've planned a meeting with the program's governing body to discuss options.

SWOT

*Questions to consider for vignette 4:*

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*Possible organizational options:*

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5. This year's PIR indicates that follow-up services were not provided to 30 percent of families who indicated a need for services during the program year.

SWOT

*Questions to consider for vignette 5:*

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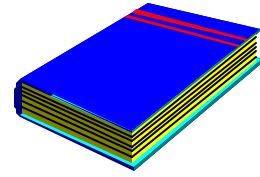
*Possible organizational options:*

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# STEP 5. BACKGROUND READING: GOAL SETTING AND SMART OBJECTIVES

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Suggested time: 15 min.

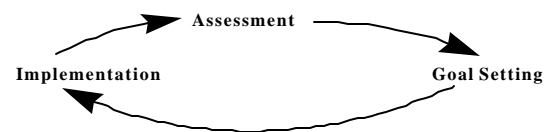
After a Head Start organization identifies the options presented by the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in its environment, it can choose the options that will bring it closer to the future it envisions for itself. Once selected, these options grow into goals, objectives, and strategies<sup>7</sup> that form its strategic or operational plans.

## I. GOAL SETTING

There are many definitions for the term *goal*. Here is one that works well for both strategic and operational planning:

“A goal is a plan that when accomplished will result in a change in a need or problem, or an outcome achieved.”<sup>8</sup>

Goals generally address the desires of the planners in a broad way (e.g., to improve communication among staff; to make Head Start more accessible to our community’s newly arriving immigrants). In organizational planning, goals are developed by (1) carefully weighing the results of the assessment of the environment and current operations, and (2) choosing feasible options that are consistent with organizational values and will best help the organization accomplish its mission.



Goals from all types of plans share a number of common features. They

- are consistent with the organization’s (or the individual’s) mission and values
- are clearly stated for all to understand

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<sup>7</sup> The hierarchy of goals and objectives varies from one management writer to another, with some labeling the larger category as “goals” and others calling it “objectives.” Many writers treat “goals” as the chief category and “objectives” as the subcategory.

<sup>8</sup> *Head Start Social Services Training Manual*. 1990. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, p. 177.

- address issues, problems, and challenges identified in the assessment process
- can provide a benchmark against which progress is determined during the evaluation process

## II. SMART OBJECTIVES<sup>9</sup>

In order to accomplish these broadly stated goals, planners articulate a number of objectives. For example, if a manager's personal goal is to improve her personal fitness, she might develop objectives related to weight loss, exercise, and relaxation. There is no magic number of objectives to include under each goal; any number of objectives that can *reasonably* be accomplished is satisfactory.

Goals are stated in broad terms. Objectives are typically stated in explicit language that answers the questions "What are we going to do?" and "When will we do it?" A popular formula for developing objectives involves the use of the acronym SMART. SMART objectives are **S**pecific, **M**easurable **A**ttainable, realistic with present or potential **R**esources, and **T**ime-bound. For example, a personal goal to lose 10 pounds within the next three months is **SMART** because it is

**Specific.** The objective is stated in unequivocal terms: to lose pounds.

**Measurable.** The objective is quantifiable: to lose *10* pounds

**Attainable.** The objective is within the person's or organization's control and range of capabilities, i.e., I *can* lose 10 pounds (but I *cannot* grow 2 inches). While objectives need to be realistic, they still need to be challenging. A plan is meaningless if the objectives have already been accomplished.

**Realistic with present or potential Resources.** The objective can be achieved without the use of outside resources or, at most, by joining an affordable weight loss plan.

**Time-bound.** The time frame is spelled out: within three months.

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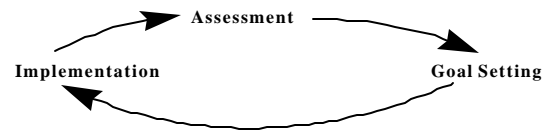
<sup>9</sup> Adapted from the Head Start *Social Services Training Manual*. 1990. A Training Guide for the Head Start Learning Community, *Planning and Evaluating for Success*, provides additional information on **SMART** objectives.

**SMART** objectives are easy to communicate to others, easy to measure, and easy to evaluate.

### III. IMPLEMENTATION: ACTION STEPS AND PLANNING CHARTS

With the objectives clearly defined, planners begin to develop action steps that address the questions who?, what?, and when?

For formal group plans, strategies are often reflected on a planning chart that depicts the action to be taken



- the person responsible for completing the action
- the date by which the action will be completed

Two types of planning charts are useful for specifying the action steps (see the following Handout). An Action Plan Chart spells out who will take the lead, what the action is, and when it needs to be completed. A Gantt chart displays the steps across a timetable. It does not specify who will carry out the action, but it does display the sequence and timing of actions in a way that makes it easy to see what needs to happen, in what order, across a calendar. The time in the calendar can be months, weeks, or even days.

Communication tools such as these help groups clarify individual roles and responsibilities in turning the plan into a reality. They also serve as handy reference tools for those who are implementing the plan.





## HANDOUT: PLANNING CHARTS

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Suggested time: 5 min.

**Goal:** To improve communication within La Paloma Head Start

**Objective:** To use Head Start quality improvement funds to network all the program's computers before September of the next program year.

### ACTION PLAN CHART

<i>Who</i>	<i>What</i>	<i>When</i>
Program director	Schedule meeting with the grantee agency's technology manager to explore options	March 1
Technology manager	Call neighboring agency that has already networked to gather information; hire consultant if necessary	March 8
Management team	Meet to discuss options, costs, and timing	March 20
Technology manager	Explore alternative costs and options	March 30
Management team	Review options; make decision on contractor	April 5–6

<i>Who</i>	<i>What</i>	<i>When</i>
Program director	Sign agreement with contractor	April 8
Technology manager/contractor	Design final plan for configuration across sites; confirm equipment at hand or on order	April 22
Management team	Sign off on plan; confirm plans for computer backup use when individual computers down during hook-up	May 2
Technology manager	Connect network	May 30

## GANTT CHART

TASK	March	April	May
1. Schedule meeting with the technology manager to explore options	x		
2. Call neighboring agency for information	x		
3. Meet to discuss options, costs, and timing	x		
4. Explore alternative costs and options	-----		
5. Review options; make decision on contractor		-----x	
6. Sign agreement with contractor		x	
7. Design final plan for configuration; confirm equipment		-----x	
8. Sign off on plan; confirm backup use plans			x
9. Connect network			-----x



## STEP 6. WORKSHEET: RECOGNIZING SMART OBJECTIVES

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Suggested time: 45 min.

**Purpose:** To provide participants with practice in developing SMART objectives.

**Part I (30 min.)** On your own, read the objectives listed for each goal and decide if they qualify as SMART (**S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, realistic with present or potential **R**esources, and **T**ime-bound). If they do not, suggest the changes needed to make them SMART.

1. To respond to the *opportunity*<sup>10</sup> presented by the growing community of Southeast Asian families in its service area, La Paloma developed a goal to expand services to the Hmong-speaking community through the following objectives:

**a. Objective:** To use available Head Start expansion dollars to open a new classroom within a year in the neighborhood where the new immigrants are settling.

*Is it SMART? If not, how can the objective be changed to become SMART?*

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**b. Objective:** To build relationships with organizations that also serve the Southeast Asian community.

*Is it SMART? If not, how can it be changed?*

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2. To respond to the *weakness* that indicates that teachers are struggling to design classroom services for children who display challenging behaviors, La Paloma established the following objectives:

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<sup>10</sup>Please note: We've included the answers to the SWOT questions in the Step 4 Worksheet in italics.

**a. Objective:** To enhance teacher capacity for working with stressed children during the fall of the next program year.

*Is it SMART? If not, how can it be changed?*

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**b. Objective:** To double the number of mental health consultation hours available during the upcoming school year.

*Is it SMART? If not, how can it be changed?*

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3. To build on their program's *strength* of an effective service planning system, La Paloma developed a goal to expand the service planning system to involve parents and community agencies as appropriate. They developed the following objectives:

**a. Objective:** For the family services manager to meet with representatives of five community agencies to explain the service planning system and to explore their interest in being involved before November 30.

*Is it SMART? If not, how can it be changed?*

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**b. Objective:** To inform parents of opportunities to engage in the service planning system.

*Is it SMART? If not, how can it be changed?*

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4. To respond to the *threat* that eligible families are moving from its service area, La Paloma developed a goal to have full enrollment in the Cityville center. They developed the following objectives:

**a. Objective:** To expand recruitment efforts into four neighborhoods outside the Cityville limits.

*Is it SMART? If not, how can it be changed?*

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**b. Objective:** To have family advocates make recruitment visits to Cityville human service agencies during the month of August to identify unserved families that might be interested in Head Start services.

*Is it SMART? If not, how can it be changed?*

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5. To respond to the *weakness* that follow-up services were not provided to 30 percent of the program's families, La Paloma developed a goal to provide follow-up services to all families.

**a. Objective:** To provide increased supervision and training to family service workers.

*Is it SMART? If not, how can it be changed?*

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**b. Objective:** To refine its system of service tracking by the end of December.

*Is it SMART? If not, how can it be changed?*

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**Part II (15 min.)** If you are working in pairs or a small group, discuss your responses and compare notes.



## STEP 7. SUMMARY

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Suggested time: 15 min.

### Key Points

- Definition and benefits of planning
- Three key elements of planning
- Differences between strategic and operational planning
- Definition of assessment
- Sources of data for assessment
- SWOT analysis tool
- Goal setting and SMART objectives
- Action steps and planning charts

### Personal Review

What did you learn from this activity?

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
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2. \_\_\_\_\_  
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3. \_\_\_\_\_  
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How will you use your new knowledge and skills in your work?

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
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2. \_\_\_\_\_  
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3. \_\_\_\_\_  
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What else do you think you might need to learn in order to master the skill of using assessment data?

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2. \_\_\_\_\_  
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3. \_\_\_\_\_  
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